

Having followed the progress of this application over the last three years, I remain unconvinced that this part of Oxfordshire is the best place for such a massive solar power station.

In particular, the southern area of the scheme lies entirely within the Oxford Green Belt, and is in a valley/flood plain, overlooked by hills on both sides. The historic village of Cumnor is located on one of these hills. The proposed development would therefore have a major impact on the landscape and designated Important Views from Cumnor and could not be screened by hedges. It would greatly change the character and appearance of the area, which is currently set within a patchwork of green fields.

The (southern) section of the site is criss-crossed by a network of footpaths, including the Oxford Green Belt Way, "a 50 mile circular walk through some of Oxfordshire's most picturesque countryside and historic villages". The Green Belt Way passes through Cumnor Village and then on through green fields to Farmoor Reservoir, the largest body of water in Oxfordshire, and an important amenity for water sports, fishing and bird watching. It is also an important location for migrating birds, and has been featured in the BBC's programme Countryfile. On the other side of the valley is Oxford University's world-renowned ecological research station at Wytham Woods, and the Hill End field studies centre, which educates thousands of young people about the natural world and uses the local footpaths for outward bound activities. Groups from the nearby Youlbury Scout Activity Centre are also often seen hiking in the southern area of the proposed scheme.

The southern site is therefore surrounded by facilities that are important for wildlife, recreation, ecological research and education. It is fulfilling its role as Green Belt land in that it prevents urban sprawl, protects the setting of a historic city (Oxford) and villages (Cumnor) and assists in protecting the countryside from encroachment. It also provides a gateway to the countryside for residents of central and western Oxford as it is in a portion of the Green Belt that is closest to the city and hence most easily accessible for leisure activities.

Research has shown that green spaces are a crucial aspect of cities. They protect against many of the harmful impacts of rapid urbanisation on health. They also permit social and economic benefits by providing preferential settings for relaxation, building social connections, engaging in physical activity and feeling closer to nature, including resident wildlife [<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/green-spaces-invaluable-resource-delivering-sustainable-urban-health>].

Therefore, increasing urban green space is an important strategy for addressing complex global issues such as climate change, sustainable urbanisation and health inequality. This is recognised via the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 target 7, which states "by 2030, providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities" [<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-and-disability.html>].

It should be noted that Cumnor does not have any dedicated parkland where people can exercise so the local countryside on their doorstep should be understood as filling this role for residents.

Building a power station on existing green spaces close to so many Oxfordshire residents and currently used by them for leisure and recreation therefore runs counter to many existing sustainability goals.

Taking a more commercial view, this area of Oxfordshire lies between the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, the historic university city of Oxford, and the Cotswolds villages. All of these sites are very popular with international tourists. I am sure that visitors moving between these attractions would prefer to travel through the traditional rolling green English countryside rather than through acres of industrial installations. Has the possible impact on international tourism been considered?

I strongly support:

- the Oxfordshire Host Authorities request for Botley West's proposed southern site to be removed from the application, and
- the ExA's proposed condition that if Botley West is granted permission, no construction can start until National Grid's application to VWHDC has also been granted and
- the ExA's proposed condition that PVDP must demonstrate how they are going to fund decommissioning in 42 years' time. In my view, proof of reserved funds for decommissioning should be a prerequisite.

I repeat my opposition to Botley West on the grounds of:

- Permanent, not temporary, industrialisation of the Green Belt,
- Substantial permanent Heritage, Landscape and Visual impacts, including on Public Rights of Way such as the Oxford Green Belt Way
- Contravention of made Neighbourhood Plan policies on Important Views and Flood Risk,
- Lack of assessment of cumulative impacts of other power station projects in Cumnor Parish, including the proposed National Grid substation and possible additional battery storage plants in the Green Belt
- Inadequate and error-strewn assessment of the impacts on visual amenity from domestic properties
- Noise impacts from operation and construction on homes and walkers using the many impacted footpaths
- Many unanswered questions that the applicant has effectively ignored, on everything from traffic and transport e.g. impacts of digging up the B4044 and B4017, alterations to roads in Cumnor Parish necessary to accommodate abnormal loads up to 150 tons, and impacts on the proposed B4044 Community Path; through to adverse impacts on the Hill End Outdoor Education Centre and what will happen to protected farmland species such as skylarks.

Funding

I am also concerned about the source of the funding for the proposed development, having observed the applicant's refusal to divulge where the large sums of money required to build the power station are expected to come from. Is this a money-laundering operation? Are the funds coming from dodgy sources or unfriendly powers?

I note that a number of Parliamentary Questions on this topic were tabled by Calum Miller, MP for Bicester and Woodstock on November 5th, and hope that the Energy Secretary in particular will consider them carefully:

88459: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Planning Inspectorate and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project processes in evaluating the financial viability of funding commitments made by developers of major energy projects.

88458: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the

(a) financial structure and (b) governance arrangements of (i) Blenheim Estates and (ii) the Blenheim Charitable Foundation.

88457: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the financial viability of SolarFive Ltd and Photovolt Development Partners to undertake the development of Botley West Solar Farm.

88456: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has sought the advice of the office of the Financial Sanction Implementation on reported Russian-linked funding associated with the proposed Botley West Solar Farm.

88455: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of (a) the Planning Inspectorate and (b) Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project processes to safeguard against national security risks from investment by (i) inappropriate or (ii) hostile overseas sources.

I thank the Examiners for their careful work and forensic analysis of the application and trust that they will reach the same conclusions as the majority of local residents: that this is the wrong scheme, in the wrong place, being proposed by the wrong people, for the wrong reasons.